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FLAGSTAFF FIRE DEPARTMENT

Restoration Based Fuel Management

Position Paper

Abstract: Treatments designed to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire are compatible with, and in fact complement, the principles of forest restoration. To achieve the later, one must implement the former.

Wildfire is a natural event within the southwestern ponderosa pine forest. Its very occurrence is a necessary ingredient to a healthy ecosystem. However, due to past management practices, natural fuel accumulations have been increasing for decades, resulting in an escalating trend in dangerous and destructive wildfires.

Unlike other forest issues, catastrophic fire captures the public's attention: it is dramatic, scary, threatening, and awesome, all at the same time. A green tree, even though stressed by overcrowding or infected with dwarf-mistletoe, appears "healthy" to the average citizen: a tree on fire is an all-together different story.

The 1996 fire season in our area clearly demonstrated this trend and directed the attention of the public to the plight of our forests and the risk posed by catastrophic wildfire. The result was an energized community, committed to action.

Catastrophic wildfires threaten a myriad of community values. These include scenic and watershed worth, wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, air quality, public confidence in government, public safety, structures and other infrastructure, and economic vitality. A major concern is if reduction of the fire threat is not addressed quickly, we may find ourselves without anything to restore.

Restoration should be viewed as a journey, rather than a destination. One is a goal, the other a treatment designed to move us in that direction. Fuel Management is not subordinate to **R**estoration: it is part of the **r**estoration process.

Restoration-based fuel management treatments incorporate the principles of restoration ecology. Practices are designed to reduce excessive numbers of smaller trees, retain large trees, and accept natural fire (or apply prescribed fire to mimic the natural event). More than one treatment, along with other practices, over a period of time may be required to create the conditions necessary for an improvement in overall ecosystem health.

Implemented properly, Fuel Management is a socially-welcomed practice. Should nothing be done, catastrophic fires will continue to reign unabated. Fuel Management is clearly a step toward restoring healthy ecosystems and creating a sustainable forest and community.